

Partridge Plymouth Rocks

By S. Robert Powell

Sam A. Noftzger, of Wabash, Indiana, is generally regarded as the originator of the strain of Partridge-Pencilled Plymouth Rocks that were recognized by the American Poultry Association as a standard variety in 1909 and officially admitted to *The American Standard of Perfection* on August 10, 1910, in Saint Louis. (Silver-Pencilled Rocks were admitted in 1907.) In 1909, Noftzger wrote a detailed article in which he described how he created and developed Partridge Rocks.

A copy of Noftzger's article and a vast quantity of information about Partridge Rocks were published in the *Partridge Plymouth Rock Guide Book* that was published by The American Partridge Plymouth Rock Club in 1931. A copy of that book--and a copy of *The American Partridge Plymouth Rock Club 1970 Breed Book* (published on the 60th anniversary of the breed)--were presented to this writer by Charles G. Hillenbrand, the prominent breeder of Partridge Plymouth Rocks, from Wyoming, Delaware, at the 1996 Virginia Poultry Breeders' Show at Richmond. From those two books, we have learned a great deal about Partridge Rocks, whose history and development are directly related to the so-called Cochin craze that developed during the second half of the nineteenth century in America.

At that time, there were two distinct types of Cochins: (1) the "full-feathered," or English variety, and (2) the "scanty-feathered," or American variety. For a time, the two types of Cochins competed in separate classes in shows in America, but the American Cochins, with their scanty leg feathering, were soon dropped in favor of the more massive English type. Their scanty leg feathering notwithstanding, the American-type Cochins had outstanding partridge color and were highly regarded as utility birds that laid an exceptionally large number of eggs.

For a time, Noftzger crossed the English and American types of Cochins and developed birds that had better partridge color than the pure English type and better leg feathering than the pure American type. With such birds, he won on Partridge Cochins (which he continued to breed until 1907) in shows all over America.

Noftzger was not satisfied, however. He decided that he would create a new variety of fancy poultry with the following qualities: rapid growers, good egg layers, good table birds, single combs, together with the outstanding partridge color of the American Cochins. In 1898, Noftzger, having had the

experience of helping others a few years before to create the Partridge Wyandotte, began the long process of creating Partridge-Pencilled Plymouth Rocks.

In the spring of 1898, Noftzger selected four American-type Partridge Cochin females with outstanding egg-laying qualities and exceptional partridge color. (One of those females, hatched on April 1, 1896, and named "Georgine" by Noftzger, laid 27 eggs in 28 consecutive days.) Georgine, her full sister, and two half-sisters were each mated with an Indian Game (Dark Cornish) cockerel with bright yellow legs, thin high comb, eyes toward the bay as much as possible, and Plymouth Rock shape as near as possible.

The next year, 1899, Noftzger mated eight of the females from that first cross with Golden Wyandotte cockerels, mostly single-comb sports, principally in pairs and trios, but one or two of the most desirable males were given an extra female. The third year, 1900, nine single matings were made between the best females hatched in 1899 from the single matings and the Golden Wyandotte males used in 1899.

The following year, 1901, ten pens were mated, using cocks and hens for the first time. In 1902 two pens were mated. In succeeding years, female Partridge Wyandotte sports, with single combs, were introduced into the blood line. In 1907, 60 females were divided into ten breeding pens, and Noftzger noted that in that year "the new breed made the greatest progress of its history." In 1908, fourteen matings were made and over a hundred choice show birds, regarded unhesitatingly by judges as the best in existence, were produced. Noftzger's ten years of ceaseless work in developing Partridge Rocks had paid off. Of such birds, R. LeRoy Armitage said: "They have the laying qualities of the Leghorn, the meat and vigor of the Game, and the beauty of the Partridge Cochin--truly a wonderful creation!"

Other breeders created their own strains of Partridge Rocks, using their own means, more or less at the same time that Noftzger was doing so. Noftzger's strain, however, was generally regarded as the finest strain of Partridge Rocks.

Among those other creators of strains of Partridge Rocks were E. O. Thiem; Dr. W. C. Crocker of Foxboro, MA (began his efforts in 1899; relied heavily on single comb sports from Partridge Wyandottes; also used Golden-Pencilled Hamburgs, Golden-Laced Wyandottes, Brown Leghorns, and Partridge Cochins; Crocker is regarded by some as the originator of the primary eastern strain, Noftzger as the creator of the western strain).

Also, John Lowe of Swansea, MA; Rowland G. Buffinton of Fall River, MA; Messrs. Brackenbury and Cornell (used single-combed sports

from Partridge Wyandottes, also Partridge Cochins and Brown Leghorns; this Cornell is Ezra Cornell, who founded Cornell University); Elmwood Farms, Weston, NJ; Hillcrest Farm (William F. Fotherall, proprietor), Oakland, PA; and Rock Hill Poultry Farm, Ossining, NY.

The fact that all those breeders--and many more--were all working, more or less simultaneously, to create the Partridge Rock is all the more remarkable these days, when more than a few of the standard breeds of poultry that were created in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries are fighting for their lives, so to speak.

In the years after 1910, Bird Bros. (Charles E. and Cyrus M.) of Meyersdale, Pennsylvania were very successful breeders and exhibitors of Partridge Plymouth Rocks. Other prominent early developers and breeders from the early years were F. N. Perkins (Freeport, IL), Dr. W. C. Crocker (Foxboro, MA), W. F. Fotherall (Philadelphia, PA), R. G. Buffinton (Fall River, MA), Dr. W. J. Pirie (Springville, IA), R. A. Muth (Huntington, WV), Porter P. Black (West Liberty, IA).

Highly regarded and well-known breeders in more recent years (listed in the 1970 Breed Book) are Rose F. Hurdle, Andrew M. Stodel, Beau-Site Farm (Laurence C. Allen), Hoelker Bros., Roy J. Whitener, Van Bonneau, Henry K. Miller, E. Billings Miner, Tom Darden, Harold A. Hulbert, and Charles G. Hillenbrand.

The American Partridge Plymouth Rock Club (APPRC) was organized between January 1st and March 2nd, 1931. The officers for 1931 were President, Joseph L. Hoelker, Oldenburg, IN; Vice-President, Dr. W. J. Pirie, Springville, IA; Secretary-Treasurer, Laurence C. Allen, Sanford, ME; Election Commissioner, Everett T. Lord, Sanford, ME.

In the first eight months of its existence, the APPRC, with over 50 members, drew up and adopted a constitution and bylaws, and published its *Guide Book*, under the direction of the Guide Book Committee, made up of J. L. Hoelker, R. L. Armitage, and L. C. Allen. The American Partridge Plymouth Rock Club published monthly club notes; it designated *Plymouth Rock Monthly of Chicago* as its official monthly club magazine for 1931. Official APPRC ribbons were offered by the club for champion male, champion female, and champion pen at shows where five or more entries in each of those classes were shown by three or more club members.

Partridge Rocks--characterized by the APPRC as "The Beauty-Utility Fowl"--were shown in large numbers at many shows earlier in this century. At present-day poultry shows there are sometimes less than 25 birds in the entire American class. In light of that fact, consider the number of Partridge

Rocks alone that were exhibited at these shows in the past: Madison Square Garden, 1915, 81 birds; Keene, NH, 1926, 91 birds; Boston, 1927, 80 birds; Portland, 1927, 122 birds; Athol, MA, 1928, 143 birds; Iowa City, 1928, 119 birds; Providence, 1929, 113 birds; Portland, 1930, 62 birds; Atlanta, 1939, 153 birds; Oklahoma City, 1946, 106 birds.

There were 38 members in the club in 1970. Among them were Laurence C. Allen (Beau-Site Farm), Mrs. Alice E. Carpenter (who hatched and raised the Beau-Site Farm chicks for 35 years), Charles G. Hillenbrand, Dick C. Horstman, Cyril F. Menges, Henry K. Miller (Blue Stream Farm), and Tommy Stanley. The president of the Partridge Plymouth Rock Club in 1970 was Van Bonneau of Dodson, TX.

Several engravings by A. O. Schilling of Partridge Rocks are known to exist. Among them are: "First Prize Partridge Rock Cockerel, Madison Square Garden, January 1921, Bred and Owned by Bird Brothers, Meyersdale, PA"; "First Prize Partridge Rock Cockerel, Madison Square Garden, New York, January 1926, Bred and Owned by Bird Brothers, Meyersdale, PA"; "First Prize Partridge Plymouth Rock Hen, Chicago Coliseum Exposition, December 1930, Bred and Owned by Bird Brothers, Meyersdale, Penn."; "First Prize Hen and Grand Champion Partridge Rock, National Club Meet, and First Prize Partridge Rock Cock, Madison Square Garden, Dec. 1949--Jan. 1950, Bred and Owned by Beau-Site Farm, L. C. Allen, Prop., Sanford, Maine"; "Grand Champion Partridge Plymouth Rock Trio (1st old Trio) National Club Meet, Boston, Mass., Jan. 1953, Bred and Owned by Beau-Site Farm, L. C. Allen, Prop., Sanford, Maine."

The *Partridge Plymouth Rock Guide Book* that was published by the American Partridge Plymouth Rock Club in 1931 contains, as we mentioned earlier, a great deal of information on Partridge Rocks, including the following articles: "Partridge Rocks--Reflections on Nature" by F. N. Perkins; "History and Development of Partridge Plymouth Rocks" by Henry J. Hunt; "High and Low Tides in Partridge Rock History" by R. LeRoy Armitage; "Why We Are Breeding the Partridge Rocks" by Hoelker Brothers; "What Constitutes a Real Partridge Plymouth Rock?" by S. F. Raff.

Also, "A Woman's Success with Partridge Rocks" by Mrs. Fern Smith; "The Partridge Plymouth Rocks are Steadily Advancing" by D. M. Barcus; "View of the Partridge Plymouth Rock from All Angles" by R. LeRoy Armitage; "Improvement in Partridge Plymouth Rocks" by Mack T. Marshall; "Raising Partridge Rocks" by Dr. W. J. Pirie; "Whose Cherry Is Red" by Shade; "Clear Hackled Females" by F. N. Perkins; "Partridge

Plymouth Rock Color and Markings" by Laurence C. Allen; "The Beautiful and Artistic Partridge Plymouth Rocks" by Joseph L. Hoelker; "Partridge Rocks--Their Quality and How to Mate Them" by Edward A. Hamann; "Partridge Rock Mating Hints" by Laurence C. Allen; "Mating Partridge Plymouth Rocks" by S. A. Nofztger; "Trapnesting Partridge Plymouth Rocks" by Thomas G. Kinvig; and "Partridge Plymouth Rocks" by Rev. F. H. Eva Holcombe.

Among the breeders and exhibitors of standard Partridge Plymouth Rocks at the present are Fred Brusco (West Patterson, NJ), Norman Ennis (Pocomoke, MD), Charles G. Hillenbrand (Wyoming, DE), Bill and Joy Krueger (Manitowoc, WI), S. Robert Powell (Carbondale, PA), Robert Richie (Rome, NY), Jerry Sliker (Layton, NJ), Tommy Stanley (Ashland, VA), and Joe Vivian (Amboy, IL).

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AMERICAN POULTRY ASSOCIATION

Grand Master Exhibitor Award

OF

PARTRIDGE PLYMOUTH ROCK

TO

S. Robert Powell

November 14, 1998
Date

Pat Malone
Pat Malone, APA President

Lorna Rhodes
Lorna Rhodes, APA Sec/Treasurer



Lifetime Achievement Award Presented to S. Robert Powell by the American Poultry Association at Knoxville, TN, December 6, 2014:



S. Robert Powell

Robert is the only member of the APA who has been named a Grand Master Exhibitor of standard Partridge Plymouth Rocks, which he has raised and shown for over 30 years, his birds having been named Champion Standard and Grand Champion of the Show on many occasions over the years. At present he also raises and shows standard Malays, his original stock having come from Basil Smith, that bloodline has been enriched by Robert during the past decade with birds of the highest quality from Carl Brantley. At the Yankee Fall Classic in Syracuse, NY in October 2013, a Wheaten Malay hen shown by Robert was named Champion Standard Chicken.

In 1998 Robert was licensed by the APA to judge standard and bantam chickens, and since then has judged 90 shows from Boston to Billings—and at dozens of places in between. He is best known as a judge of standard chickens. Robert's mentor in poultry judging was the late George Schroeder, the legendary breeder and exhibitor of bantam Cochins, who was widely regarded as one of the leading judges of exhibition poultry in America in the twentieth century.

Robert is a prolific writer on exhibition poultry and scores of his articles on all aspects of poultry husbandry, history, and management have been published in the yearbooks of the APA, in "News and Views," and in other national poultry publications over the past 30 years. In 2006, he and Duff H. S. Wehle wrote and published "The History of the Madison Square Garden Poultry Show, 1883-1953." In 1998, Robert wrote the American Game bantam section of the highly acclaimed German encyclopedia of bantam poultry, "Handbuch der Zwerghuhnrasen der Welt" that was published that year.

Robert believes strongly that it is important to establish and maintain text and photo archives about exhibition poultry—for the record and for research purposes—and to that end has donated microfiche copies of his poultry papers for the period 1988-2001 to both the National Poultry

Museum and Heritage Center in Bonners Springs, KS, and to the National Agricultural Library in Beltsville, MD.

In 2009, Robert donated to the Albert R. Mann Library at Cornell University his personal collection of 721 issues of "Poultry Press" for the period 1943-2000 (originals plus 14 rolls of 35 millimeter silver archival microfilm). Through funding from the American Poultry Historical Society (Madison, WI) a copy of the complete set of this microfilm edition of "Poultry Press, 1943-2000" has also been placed in the National Agricultural Library in Beltsville, MD.

Robert served as APA District 2 director for the period 2000-2006. To begin his service to the APA, he created and launched the APA District 2 webpage, which he actively managed throughout his six years of service as APA director. In the six years that he served as APA District 2 Director, he attended every meeting of the APA's Board of Directors and every APA general-membership meeting (Woodstock, Wapakoneta, Lincoln, Fort Worth, Columbus, Lucasville, Lake City, Syracuse, Delmarva). At those meetings he actively advocated the interests and voiced the concerns of APA members in District 2 and elsewhere before the governing board and the membership of the organization.

As an APA director, he served as Chairman of the APA Membership Committee, which not only created and published a new APA membership recruitment brochure but also distributed 7,500 copies of that brochure throughout North America. In addition he initiated a survey of APA members who allowed their memberships in the APA to lapse and requested their opinions of the quality and value to them of the APA's products and services. Robert also participated actively in the process of correcting and revising the 1998, 2001, and 2006 editions of the APA's "American Standard of Perfection."

During the poultry and premises identification hysteria in the first decade of this century, Robert chaired the APA/ABA Joint Committee on Poultry Identification (with David Adkins, Pat Lacey, Don Schrider, and Bill Wulff) that worked with the US Department of Agriculture NAIS/APHIS to produce the draft document in which were described the bird identification standards and procedures that might be followed in the exhibition, 4-H, youth, and backyard poultry industries to identify birds and track them to specific premises in the event of an outbreak of a disease of concern within 48 hours after discovery of that disease. As a result of the work by this committee and its members, the USDA and a broad range of commercial and non-commercial poultry and avian groups now regard the APA and the ABA as important participants in all discussions and meetings relative to the Poultry Subchapter of the National Animal Identification System.

Robert is an enthusiastic promoter of exhibition and backyard poultry. In 1997, he arranged and orchestrated the day-long visit by Martha Stewart on May 3rd of that year to the ABA Semi-Annual Meeting and Convention, hosted by the Central Pennsylvania Avian Club, in Bloomsburg, PA. At that show, Martha Stewart chose the most beautiful bird in the show, a White Crested Black Polish hen, shown by Joel and Ellen Henning. Footage that was shot by the film crew that accompanied Martha Stewart on this visit to Bloomsburg became the basis of a 30-minute program about exhibition poultry that has been broadcast nationally on Martha Stewart Living no less than seven times. In conversations with Martha Stewart in recent years, Martha Stewart has told Robert that the poultry show program at Bloomsburg has been one of

the most popular shows in the history of the Martha Stewart show. Robert also actively promoted exhibition and back-yard poultry and the book "Extraordinary Chickens" by Stephen Green-Armytage through an appearance on the "Today" show on October 25, 2000 with a dozen live exhibition birds. The positive poultry publicity that resulted from those national television broadcasts has contributed significantly to the present-day enthusiasm from coast to coast for back yard and exhibition poultry.

On Saturday, August 6, 2005, Robert judged at the New Jersey State Fair at Augusta, NJ. A writer and a photographer from the "New York Times" were also there. The result of this fortuitous combination of raw materials was the article "Scratch a Suburb, Find a Chicken" by Ken Druse that was published in the August 11, 2005 issue of the "New York Times" (lead-in on page 1; story with photographs on page 1 of House and Garden Section). The positive consequences for the exhibition poultry hobby from this article were many, in that it opened the door to exhibition poultry for a great many potential exhibition poultry enthusiasts everywhere.

Together with the Rev. Roland Romig and Don Perrin, Robert initiated and guided the three and one-half year process that resulted in the admission of pearl, lavender, and white Helmeted Guinea Fowl to the APA's "American Standard of Perfection" (January 2004, Lake City, FL). At the qualifying meet for Guinea Fowl, judged by Curtis R. Oakes, at Lucasville in October 2003, there were 220 Helmeted Guinea Fowl, of 13 varieties, in the show. The Champion Guinea of the Show was a Pearl hen shown by S. Robert Powell.

Robert was born and raised in northeastern Pennsylvania on a family farm that was established by his Scottish ancestors in the 1840s. In tribute to those Scots and to his English ancestors as well, Robert maintained for many years on that homestead, now designated a "Century Farm" by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, a herd of Hereford cattle. Robert's father, a grandson of the Welsh bard Athenydd, raised production standard Light Brahmas, for meat and eggs, and White Holland turkeys, for the holiday markets.

Robert is a retired college teacher, who was awarded a Ph.D. by Indiana University in Bloomington in 1974, and over the years has taught French Language and Literature and the Humanities at George Washington University, Indiana University, SUNY Oswego, Brooklyn College, Susquehanna University, and Penn State University. He has been president of the Carbondale Historical Society for the past thirty years and is presently writing a 24-volume series on the Delaware and Hudson Canal Company's Gravity Railroad, the first commercially successful railroad in America. The first five volumes in that series were published in October 2014. In addition to raising and showing standard Partridge Rocks and Malays at the present time, Robert also raises Mute Swans and Jacobin pigeons.

To be the recipient of a lifetime achievement award by the American Poultry Association is a great honor and Robert is very pleased to here express his sincere thanks to the present officers and directors of the APA for this important award.

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